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SUBJECT: MIXED GERMAN VIEWS ON TURKISH EU MEMBERSHIP
PERSPECTIVE

Classified By: CDA JOHN KOENIG FOR REASONS 1.4 (A) AND (C).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: U.S. support for Turkish entry into the EU has drawn ire from the CDU/CSU in recent months, but the importance of binding Turkey to the West and rewarding the significant reforms Turkey has enacted does not escape most German politicians. However, even those politicians most sympathetic to Turkey's situation worry that vocal U.S. support tends to undermine Turkey's prospects, at least in Germany. The question of whether Turkey should enter the EU has long been a contentious issue in Germany, and politicians continue to disagree on what the ultimate end state for Turkey-EU relations should be. Recent statements by Chancellor Merkel have thrown the limelight back on this issue as some Germans are pushing for an early effort to redefine Turkey's end state rather than allowing inertia to move negotiations slowly along. Privately, we should encourage key German interlocutors to support Turkish accession while remaining sensitive to their genuine concerns about the effect this might have on the EU and Germany. Publicly articulating U.S. views on Turkey's future with the EU in a way that advances our interests is a challenge; we risk being misunderstood and even weakening Turkey's position here. End summary.

¶2. (C) The question of Turkey's future with the EU drew considerable public attention in Germany following President Obama's remarks last month before the Turkish parliament. While the SPD welcomed the President's remarks, many CDU/CSU politicians dug in their heels against any possibility of Turkish membership. CDU/CSU and even some SPD members publicly criticize Washington's support of Turkey's application as interfering or meddling in EU affairs, and the German press often mischaracterizes Washington's position as pushing for a "rash decision." The debate was further enflamed by Chancellor Merkel herself at a joint appearance in early May with French President Sarkozy that kicked off the campaign for the June 7 EU Parliament elections. Merkel at a campaign event on May 19 reiterated the message: "Privileged partnership for Turkey, yes; full membership, no." Merkel's position is unlikely to win extra votes but clearly plays to her base, given the minimal public support in Germany for Turkish EU membership.

Merkel: Turkey Doesn't Belong in the EU

¶3. (C) Merkel repeated her opposition to Turkish EU membership on May 11 at a joint press event with Sarkozy in Berlin, and warned against a "Europe without borders." Merkel's comments fly in the face of the November 2005 coalition agreement between the CDU/CSU and SPD, but the agreement leaves some wiggle room for the CDU "(s)hould the EU not be capable of admission or should Turkey not be able to fully meet all obligations required for membership." In such a situation, "Turkey must be bound as closely as possible to European structures in a manner that further promotes its privileged relationship with the EU." Merkel proposes such a privileged relationship rather than

membership, and argues that further EU enlargement would make the union incapable of acting. Moderate members of the center-right do not challenge her on this -- Chairman of the Bundestag Foreign Relations Committee Ruprecht Polenz criticizes Turkey as not fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria "in real life." Moreover, Polenz argues that Turkey currently remains too far from the EU's "community of values." Polenz may personally support a long-term membership prospect for Turkey, but openly says that this is a minority view within the CDU, which is pushing to redefine the goal of EU negotiations with Turkey sooner rather than later.

Political Positioning During an Election Year

14. (C) Turkey is a hot topic in Germany, largely due to the minority population of three million, making it the largest ethnic minority in the country. Of the three million, only 700,000 have the right to vote, making the Turkish vote relatively small in an electorate of over 62 million for the September Bundestag elections. Moreover, Turkish voters appear unlikely to base their vote solely on the EU issue, while other German voters may take note of where the parties fall on this contentious issue. According to analysis of a poll of 3000 Turkish immigrants conducted by a German firm in March, Turks do not base their vote on a party's stance toward Turkey's potential to enter the EU, and even if they did, there would be little potential electoral gain to the CDU/CSU among Turks for reversing position.

15. (C) The CDU/CSU sees its stance against Turkish membership as addressing the views of core constituencies.

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Officials such as Polenz point out that German public opinion is "fairly strongly" opposed to Turkish admission into the EU. The CDU/CSU argues that Turkey neither fulfills the EU's criteria nor fits into the European value system, and that the EU cannot accommodate another member until the Lisbon Treaty is ratified. Many conservative voters are uneasy with the size and uneven integration of the Turkish minority in Germany, adding an emotional element to resistance to Turkey's eventual EU accession. Merkel's proposal of a privileged partnership with Turkey reflects the majority view in the CDU/CSU that Turkey will not enter the EU even in the far future.

16. (C) Although the SPD and FDP publicly voice their support for Turkey's application, they remain hesitant to place a timeline on accession, appearing content to allow negotiation to slowly drag on. FDP Party Chairman Westerwelle in an interview early this month with the magazine Der Spiegel said an interruption of negotiations between Turkey and the EU would signal the "end of wise foreign policy," where the EU continues to reward Turkey's progress. Bundestag member and FDP Foreign Policy Spokesman Hoyer argues that it would be a "fatal mistake to torpedo Turkey's reform efforts" by taking away any membership perspective. Westerwelle admits that the end state with Turkey may be a privileged partnership rather than full membership, but he rejects Merkel's position of changing the end goal of negotiations soon rather than later.

In short, the EU door should appear to remain open for Turkey.

COMMENT: Moving Forward With Germany

17. (C) Campaigning against Turkish EU membership is more likely to win votes than lose them in Germany during the EU parliament and Bundestag election campaigns, especially in light of feelings of enlargement fatigue and the financial and economic crisis. The government that emerges from the September Bundestag elections will set German policy anew, and, provided the SPD, FDP and Greens stand firm, we would expect continued if half-hearted support for Turkey's accession procedure. U.S. private approaches on eventual Turkish membership should be crafted to avoid unintentionally

fueling opposition to the idea, which could leave Turkey farther from membership. Germans are particularly prone to believe that American interlocutors ignore or discount the consequences of Turkish accession on the effective functioning of the EU and other German interests. The Administration,s position in favor of Turkey is well known, especially after the President,s April visit to Ankara and Istanbul. A public reiteration of our support in Germany likely would play to the CDU/CSU public image as resisting U.S. efforts to cave on a popular policy. End comment.
Koenig